

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6737

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FOR SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SY, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: STATE 62097

1. SUMMARY: ASAD IS DISTURBED AT PROSPECT OF SERIES OF MILITARY COUPS IN LEBANON. STATES SYRIA HAS NOT YET DECIDED ITS POSITION AND IS MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH ALL FACTIONS. GAVE NO INDICATION HE INTENDS INTRODUCE SYRIAN REGULARS INTO LEBANON. END SUMMARY

2. ASAD PROMPTLY GRANTED ME APPOINTMENT THIS AFTERNOON WHICH HE HAD TO LIMIT TO 35 MINUTES IN VIEW EXTREMELY CROWDED SCHEDULE. AFTER HEARING OUR ASSESSMENT CONTAINED PARA 2 REFTEL, HE COMMENTED THAT LEBANESE PROBLEM REMAINED EXTREMELY COMPLEX AND SOLUTION DEPENDED OBVIOUSLY NOT ONLY ON WHETHER FRANGIE REMAINED IN OFFICE. HE IS UNCERTAIN WHAT WOULD FOLLOW FRANGIE'S OUSTER; "I SAY THIS DESPITE THE FACT THAT FRANGIE BECAUSE OF HIS OBSTINACY HAS BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT OF ALL LEBANESE FOR US TO DEAL WITH ON OUR POLITICAL INITIATIVES.

3. ASAD, THINKING ALOUD, POSED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

A. WILL FRANGIE RESIGN?

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B. IF HE DOES NOT RESIGN, WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

C. IF HE DOES RESIGN, WHAT THEN?

D. WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCE OF HIS STAYING IN OFFICE DESPITE THE OPPOSITION OF MOST MILITARY AND CIVILIAN GROUPINGS IN LEBANON?

E. WHAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME OF EITHER OF THESE COURSES IN THE SHORT AND THE LONG RUN?

HE OBSERVED, "ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS REQUIRE SUBSTANTIVE ANSWERS. TODAY THE MAJORITY OF LEBANESE BLOCS ARE MERELY MANEUVERING WITHOUT THINKING AHEAD. WE STILL HAVE ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION AND THUSFAR HAVE REACHED NO DEFINITE DECISION."

4. FOR SYRIA, PRESIDENT CONTINUED, THE PROBLEM IS NOT ONE OF CONSTITUTIONALITY OR NON-CONSTITUTIONALITY. THE WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT DILEMMA MAY OR MAY NOT BE REGULATED BY THE LEBANESE CONSTITUTION. SYRIA WAS CONTINUING ITS CONTACTS WITH ALL THE LEBANESE FACTIONS. SYRIA'S COUNSEL TO THEM WAS TO MAINTAIN TRANQUILITY AND TO AVOID RESORT TO FIGHTING. THIS HAS BEEN SYRIA'S ONLY COUNSEL SINCE AHDAB'S MOVE. SYRIA, OF COURSE, KNOWS THAT TRANQUILITY BY ITSELF IS NO FINAL ANSWER BUT NEITHER WOULD FIGHTING SOLVE LEBANON'S PROBLEM. WHEN AHDAB HAD TELEPHONED HIM YESTERDAY (MARCH 14) HE HAD TOLD HIM THIS, AS HE HAD ON EARLIER OCCASION TOLD FRANGIE.

5. PRESIDENT CONCLUDED HIS REMARKS WITH, "OF COURSE, WE KNOW AT THE SAME TIME THERE ARE AMONG THE VARIOUS BLOCS IN LEBANON THOSE DESIROUS OF WINNING SYRIAN SUPPORT AND WHO CHERISH GOODWILL TOWARDS SYRIA. I CAN ONLY TELL YOU WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION IN LEBANON BUT HAVE NOT YET FORMED A DEFINITE IDEA ABOUT IT."

6. ASAD THEN ASKED IF WE HAD ANY DEFINITE ASSESSMENTS. I REPLIED THE FOUR POINTS (PARA 2 REFTEL) I HAD MADE AT THE OPENING OF OUR CONVERSATION WERE AS PRECISE AS WE COULD BE TO DATE. HE ASKED IF WE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME THE LEBANESE COULD REACH A SOLUTION WITHOUT FURTHER

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RESORT TO VIOLENCE. REPLIED SYRIA HAD OPENED THE DOOR TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN JANUARY AND THAT ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT BE DEPRESSING TO WATCH LEBANESE POLITICIANS IN ACTION, WE BELIEVED THEY DID HAVE THE CAPACITY TO REACH THEIR OWN POLITICAL SOLUTION.

7. ASAD THEN NOTED HE WOULD BE HAVING FURTHER CONTACTS TODAY WITH A VARIETY OF LEBANESE EMISSARIES. "WE SHALL

SEE. WE FEAR THERE MAY BE A WHOLE SERIES OF AHDABS."

8. I THEN DREW ON REFTTEL PARA 3 TO ASK IF THERE ANY WAY WE COULD BE HELPFUL. ALSO NOTED IT WOULD BE MOST DESIRABLE FOR LEBANESE TO MAINTAIN QUIET IN THE SOUTH. ASAD RESPONDED THAT THE PROBLEM WAS A LEBANESE ONE AND NOT A FIGHT BETWEEN LEBANON AND ISRAEL, "HOWEVER MUCH ISRAEL MIGHT LIKE TO BENEFIT FROM INSTABILITY ON THE BORDER." HE AGREED THAT ISRAEL SHOULD BE GIVEN "NO EXCUSE TO BENEFIT" FROM THE LEBANESE CRISIS.

9. AT THE END OF INTERVIEW I EXPRESSED HOPE WE COULD STAY IN CLOSEST CONTACT. HE AGREED. NOTED HE HAS NO SPECIAL IDEAS AT PRESENT HOW USG MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO RESTORING STABILITY IN LEBANON BUT WILL PASS ANY SUCH THOUGHTS TO ME THROUGH FONMIN KHADDAM.

10. PRESIDENT SENDS YOU HIS BEST REGARDS.

11. COMMENT: PRESIDENT WAS HIS USUAL CALM AND THOUGHTFUL SELF. HE GAVE EVERY APPEARANCE OF MEANING WHAT HE SAID, THAT SYRIA HAS NOT FORMULATED ANY SPECIFIC POLICY TOWARDS LEBANON. HE CERTAINLY GAVE NO HINT THAT INTRODUCTION OF SYRIAN REGULARS WAS HIGH ON HIS LIST OF OPTIONS.

12. WHILE THERE SOME INDICATORS AND MANY RUMORS THAT SYRIAN ARMY IS ON ALERT STATUS, THIS IS NOT UNUSUAL GIVEN LEBANESE CRISIS. AS REPORTED THROUGH DATT CHANNELS, ON BASIS DAILY MONITORING WE HAVE NO CONCLUSIVE INDICATORS OF ANY MAJOR MOVEMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES.
MURPHY

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